

# Securitization of the unemployed and counter-conductive resistance in Tunisia

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## Abstract

While resistance has been increasingly studied in critical security studies, its role has been mainly understood as either a deconstructive or a reconstructive force in processes of securitization owing to the perceived externality of resistance to domination. By contributing to the governmentality approach to security with Foucault's concept of counter-conduct, this article aims to explicate a particular mode of resistance in which the securitized subject resists, not by refusing the status of being securitized, but by counter-securitizing the self. In doing so, the article shows how dominating and resisting actors mutually construct a particular issue as security. The utility of the concept of counter-conduct is empirically examined via the case of Tunisia, where the unemployed have been securitized in the context of counter-terrorism since the 2011 uprising. By analysing the narratives of the ruling elites and unemployed protesters collected from local news, Facebook posts and semi-structured interviews conducted by the author between 2016 and 2017, the article illustrates how protesters actively participated in the securitization of the unemployed in order that they might be able to continue their socio-economic struggle and position their right to work as the most efficient way of fighting terrorism.

## Keywords

Counter-conducts, critical security studies, Foucault, protest, resistance, Tunisia

## Introduction

The possibility and role of resistance in processes of securitization has drawn increased scholarly attention. In part, this trend has been made possible by the contribution of critical approaches to security studies, particularly the initial theory of securitization developed by the Copenhagen School, in which security was conceptualized as an intersubjective social construction that involves not only 'securitizing actors' but also 'audiences' (Buzan et al., 1998; Wæver, 1995). Simultaneously, however, the increasing debate on resistance in securitization has been also associated with calls for 'going beyond' the Copenhagen School, which has been accused of predominantly focusing on

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*dominant voices* represented by the state while neglecting the role of non-state actors as potential partners, challengers and/or producers of security (Aradau, 2004; Balzacq, 2005; Bigo, 2002; McDonald, 2008; Roe, 2012; Williams, 2004), and, as a result of this, of failing to grasp the contested nature of a politics of security in which heterogeneous actors attempt to constitute and reconstitute specific issues as threats for their own political purposes (Bigo, 2002; Bigo and Tsoukala, 2008: 4).

A range of works in critical security studies have therefore attempted to understand the location and function of resistance in relation to securitization. For instance, there have been scholarly efforts to explicate 'deconstructive' aspects of resistance, highlighting its role in the rejection of certain securitizing moves (e.g. Stritzel and Chang, 2015). On the other hand, criticizing the deconstructive approach's negative conceptions of security and its normative preference for desecuritization, some scholars have focused on 'reconstructive' aspects of resistance, emphasizing the possibility and necessity of transforming the meaning of security as a whole (e.g. Bilgic, 2015; Booth, 2007; Nunes, 2012). All these studies have contributed to the understanding of various aspects of resistance in the construction of security. Yet, because these works tend to maintain a sharp distinction between domination and resistance, they fail to capture an important aspect of the game of security, namely, the existence of a mutually constitutive relationship between the two forces and their *mutual* construction of a particular type of security.

The present article endeavours to contribute to the debate on resistance in securitization by drawing attention to a unique form of resistance in which the securitized subject resists, not through the *refusal* of the status of being securitized, but through what can be called *counter*-securitization of the *self*. Building upon Michel Foucault's works and the literature on counter-conduct, I suggest that the notion of counter-conduct can be useful for elucidating the ways in which resisting actors challenge dominant securitizing moves *from within*, thereby reifying and at the same time unsettling the dominant discourse of security. Rather than presenting it as a theory in the positivist sense, I propose counter-conduct as part of a governmentality analytic that grasps a particular intersubjective process of securitization in which security is performed by the contested and yet mutually constitutive relationship between governing and resisting actors.

My arguments are elaborated empirically through an analysis of the attempt by Tunisia's ruling elites to securitize the unemployed in the context of the so-called 'war on terror' and unemployed protesters' resistance to that securitization process. While Tunisia has been hailed by international observers as the only successful democracy among the so-called Arab Spring countries (see, for example, Stepan, 2012), there has been little change in relation to the problem of unemployment and the impoverishment of the country's interior regions, which were the very reasons behind the uprising (Bayat, 2017; Boukhars, 2017; Cavatorta, 2015). This absence of fundamental changes in the socio-economic structure of the country has led a number of unemployed youths to take to the streets again (Chomiak, 2016; Merone, 2015; Vatthauer and Weipert-Fenner, 2017), but Tunisia's ruling elites have attempted to marginalize unemployment issues and regulate the protests of the unemployed, partly, and significantly, through their (ab)use of the threat of terrorism (Aliriza, 2015; Boubekour, 2015). Despite its importance for the trajectory of democracy in Tunisia, the question of the increasing fear of terrorism in Tunisian society and its relation to the contentious politics between the country's governing elites and unemployed protesters remains untouched. Nor has the relevance of the Tunisian case to security studies in terms of security politics been explored to date.

Drawing on discourse analysis of primary data, this article explicates how the elites' securitization of the unemployed through the discourse of (counter-)terrorism served as a *technology* of neoliberal governing through which to regulate and govern the unemployed in such a way that the exercise of the latter's political freedom would not threaten or undermine the continued

marketization of Tunisia. More importantly, it deploys a counter-conduct analytic to visualize and elucidate a particular dimension of resistance by Tunisia's unemployed in which protesters resisted such securitization by seeking to be securitized and to securitize the self differently, thereby sustaining and simultaneously destabilizing the elites' securitizing moves. I argue that unpacking Tunisian unemployed protesters' counter-securitization of the self, which is closely connected but cannot simply be reduced to struggles against socio-economic marginalization, offers a nuanced understanding of how unemployed protesters challenge a neoliberal regime of power *from within* in post-uprising Tunisia.

## **Governmentality, securitization and resistance**

There have been several scholarly efforts in critical security studies to understand processes of securitization by engaging with Foucault's notion of governmentality (or conduct of conduct) (e.g. Aradau and Van Munster, 2007; Arik, 2018; Baker-Beall, 2009; Best, 2017; Bigo, 2002, 2008; De Larrinaga, 2011). While the foci vary, these studies have attempted to elucidate political and inter-subjective characteristics of processes of securitization by utilizing governmentality as an analytic of 'the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations, and tactics' (Foucault, 1991: 102) that, while performed by multiple actors in heterogeneous fields, together constitute securitization of particular objects. Didier Bigo (2008: 11), for instance, has suggested that global policing is not a unified strategy but rather an 'effect of anonymous multiple struggles' involving routinized practices performed by diverse professions in a field of security. Claudia Aradau and Rens van Munster (2007) have also attempted to show how the logic of the 'war on terror' and technologies of risk insurance are performed through mundane administrative processes, underlining the role of multiple actors in constructing particular issues as security threats.

Having contributed to the understanding of securitization as convoluted and intersubjective processes, the Foucauldian approach has also attracted criticism for its supposed failure to account for the role of resistance (see, for example, Bilgic, 2015; Booth, 2005; Nunes, 2012). Considering the inseparability of power and resistance in Foucault's works, it is rather surprising that the governmentality literature has made very little contribution to the study of resistance in securitization. In his critique of Agamben, Bigo (2007: 11–13) briefly mentioned the capacity of resistance to challenge processes of subjectification and subjugation, and yet he did not elaborate upon Foucault's notion of resistance in any detail. There have been a few scholars whose work has focused on the capacity of resistance in the construction of security through an engagement with Foucault's notion of power, but they have not explicated what his unique notion of resistance – namely, 'counter-conduct' – means or how counter-conduct differs from other approaches to resistance, such as desecuritization or resecuritization (see, for example, Balzacq, 2015).

I argue that the governmentality approach to security can better explicate the role of resistance within the dynamic of securitization when it incorporates Foucault's notion of counter-conduct in its analytical framework. As will be elaborated below, counter-conduct offers a unique analytic of resistance, one that cannot be captured by binary notions such as acceptance/rejection in securitization theory or the deconstruction/reconstruction of security in emancipatory approaches to security, by directing our attention to the contested and yet mutually constitutive relationship between governing and resisting actors within a field of security.

### *Counter-conduct and counter-securitization*

The notion of counter-conduct was developed by Foucault in his later works to explain particular points of resistance that are implicated within processes of conduct. Distinguishing it from

struggles over political subjugation or economic exploitation, Foucault defined counter-conduct as a 'struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others', and as a struggle 'to be led differently, by other men, and towards other objectives than those proposed by the apparent and official and visible governmentality of society' (Foucault, 2007: 198–201). This does not mean, however, that Foucault suggested counter-conduct as a different 'type' of resistance in isolation from political and economic struggles. As he pointed out several times, albeit ambiguously, resistance to processes of conduct never remains independent of political revolts or class struggles inasmuch as governing through (neo)liberal technologies is not separable from more conventional means of domination and exploitation (Foucault, 2007: 261, 264, 303–304). What he attempted to do with the notion of counter-conduct was instead to grasp a particular dimension of resistance that, while inextricably connected to the political and economic dimensions, reflects the 'ethical component' of resistance (Davidson, 2011: 28). This way of understanding resistance has led several scholars inspired by Foucault's approach to use counter-conduct as a way of analysing what alternative identities and forms of 'being otherwise' emerge out of resistance to processes of being conducted and how (e.g. Death, 2010; Nişancıoğlu and Pal, 2016; Odysseos, 2016).

Scholars also emphasize the usefulness of counter-conduct as part of the governmentality analytic in that it sheds light on points of resistance that themselves 'fall within the horizons of governmentality' (Kazi, 2016: 342) by explicating 'how forms of resistance rely upon, and are even implicated within, the strategies, techniques and power relationships they oppose', thereby sustaining the exercise of domination (Death, 2016: 210). It enables us to see how forms of resistance reutilize 'border-elements' internal to the principles of governmentality and, by doing so, opens up space for 'the *critique* of governmentalized modes of critique' (Kazi, 2016: 346, emphasis added). This does not mean, however, that counter-conduct assumes that governed subjects passively accept a set of rules or discourses imposed upon them. Rather, it captures points in which both dominating and resisting subjects are embedded within the same field of possibilities that link together heterogeneous domains of discourse, which in turn constrain the choices of *both* dominant *and* resistant subjects. Also, what surrounds the subjects is not so much a single hegemonic discourse but multiple discourses that sometimes contradict each other. In this sense, the inseparability of rationalities and techniques deployed by dominating and resisting subjects suggests that both conductors and counter-conductors are *subject* to and (equally) *agencies* of governmentality.

I argue that these insights made by counter-conduct studies regarding the relationship between domination and resistance can also be applied to the study of the intersubjectivity of securitization. Counter-conduct helps us to analyse how seemingly governing and resisting actors can be situated in the same field of discourses, which structures their struggle to define and enact what security might be and should be. In particular, it captures the ambivalent position of resistance that is neither fully deconstructive nor entirely reconstructive. Counter-securitization is distinct from desecuritization in that resisting subjects in the former case are not located outside the game of security, but function as securitizing players that are just as important as state institutions or elites. That counter-securitization also enacts security may seem in line with what the resecuritization approach highlights, that is, the potential of marginalized voices to compete with dominant voices and to offer alternative ways of constructing security. The counter-conduct analytic, however, differs from the resecuritization perspective in that, whereas the latter draws a sharp line between resisting and governing subjects, the former explicates how the two antagonistic groups can be located within the same field of discourses and, in doing so, reveals a mutually constitutive relationship between them in terms of their construction of a particular issue as the subject of security.

The contentious politics between the ruling elites and unemployed protesters in post-uprising Tunisia provides an illuminating case of how counter-securitization operates 'on the ground'. As will be elaborated in the empirical part of this article, close observation reveals that the

unemployed have been securitized not only by the elites but also by the protesters themselves in the context of the 'war on terror'. Facing the elites' securitizing moves, unemployed protesters have neither rejected nor escaped games of security. Instead, protesters have played them *differently* by presenting themselves as victims and as potential terrorists in such a way as to emphasize and criticize the elites' inability to provide human security and to propose the elimination of unemployment as the most effective way of winning the 'war on terror'.

## Methods

Before moving to the empirical part of this article, it is necessary to briefly outline the data collection and analysis used in the study. For the analysis of the securitizing practices of Tunisia's ruling elites, I systematically collected 473 digital news articles published by local news outlets between 1 January 2014 and 31 December 2016 that included both of the terms 'terrorism' and 'protest' in Arabic, as it is since January 2014 onwards that unemployed protesters have been increasingly securitized with the emergence of Tunisia's so-called technocrat governments. Out of these articles, the data subjected to the analysis consists of 109 narratives produced by the authorities, ruling political parties and non-state actors such as security professionals that articulated terrorism with unemployment.

In order to analyse the counter-securitizing practices, I conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with unemployed protesters in Tunisia between 2016 and 2017, and observed three official Facebook pages run by two case groups: the Union of Unemployed Graduates (UDC) and the Maknassy unemployed movement. The choice of these two movements made it possible to consider the resistance of Tunisia's unemployed at both national and local levels. Organized by a small group of unemployed individuals in 2006, the UDC became popular owing to its role during the uprising, which in turn allowed it to mobilize around 3,000 active unemployed protesters after 2011 (Weipert-Fenner, 2018). Whereas the UDC recognizes itself as the sole national union representing the interests of all unemployed youth in Tunisia, the unemployed movement in the small town of Maknassy attracted public attention in 2016 as a result of its locally based collective identity and creative ways of enacting resistance. Whereas they have different organizational structures, resources and modes of protest, a common feature shared by the UDC and Maknassy movements has been their problematization of and resistance to the ways in which they were securitized in the name of the 'war on terror'. The collected data was analysed with a particular focus on (counter-)securitizing rationalities, techniques and subjectivities observed in the narratives of the ruling elites and unemployed protesters. The texts and interviews selected in this article represent key findings from the analysis of the data.

## Securitization of the unemployed by the ruling elites

The political and economic disparities between coastal and interior Tunisia that existed during and after the French colonial era were rapidly widened under the regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (Beinin, 2016). While the two first post-independence presidents, Habib Bourguiba and Ben Ali, both relied on authoritarian means to control opposition movements, Bourguiba's state-led developmental model – the so-called social contract – between the 1960s and 1980s guaranteed jobs in public sectors and a minimal level of social protection for the majority of the population (Alexander, 2010). This social contract, however, became increasingly fragile under the Ben Ali regime with its attempts to liberalize Tunisia's economy. Ben Ali's economic reforms, which were supported and praised by domestic and global elites as an 'economic miracle', further impoverished the already marginalized segments of Tunisian society and, more importantly, caused a dramatic increase in

the unemployment rate, particularly among those with higher education, whose sense of injustice and grievance became visible through their street actions from the mid-2000s onwards. Facing socio-economic protests organized by the unemployed, the state relied heavily on violence, as seen in the 2008 Gafsa revolt that was initiated by several unemployed graduates in the Gafsa mining towns and joined by other locals whose demand for the right to work was brutally suppressed by the security apparatus (see, for example, Allal, 2013; Beinin, 2016).

A significant shift in power relations between the ruling elites and the unemployed protesters occurred when the suicide of two unemployed youths in Sidi Bouzid in December 2010 turned into mass mobilizations across Tunisia with the slogan 'Work, Liberty, National Dignity'. After Ben Ali left in January 2011, Tunisia entered a new political phase under the notion of 'transition to democracy' and, albeit with internal tensions, has rapidly transformed its political system into a liberal democracy that now respects and protects not only procedural democracy but also the rule of law, human rights and political freedom. This remarkable political reform, however, operated in parallel with a *reconfiguration* of the 'old' elements of the political economy. Many members of the former ruling party and the perceived remnants of the authoritarian rule returned to politics in new forms. More crucially, the problems of unemployment and regional inequality have remained in place, if not intensified, as the post-uprising regime continued to incorporate Tunisia into the global market.

In response to the lack of socio-economic reforms, the number of unemployed protests dramatically increased from an annual average of 47 between 2011 and 2014 to 176 in 2015 (Vatthauer and Weipert-Fenner, 2017: 10). Interestingly, what replaced the rhetoric of the economic miracle and authoritarian means of controlling the resistance by Tunisia's unemployed was a narrative that the instability caused by terrorists and unruly unemployed protesters was negatively affecting otherwise stable economic development and democracy. In constructing this narrative, the elites tactically utilized the theme of (counter-)terrorism, which had previously been a dominant discourse in Tunisian society, and articulated it in a way that included unemployed protesters. Rather than banning or repressing protests by the unemployed, which had been proven to be counterproductive as well as undesirable in terms of the country's new image as a successful democracy, the elites represented the unemployed as a potential threat to national security and, in doing so, sought to conduct the conduct of the protesters in a way that would render them manageable and governable. The following subsections elaborate upon the rationalities, techniques and subjectivities produced by the elites in the process of securitizing the unemployed.

### *Protesters are helping terrorists*

The elites' security rationality was that social unrest caused by unemployed protesters unintentionally and/or intentionally helps terrorists infiltrate into and commit terrorist attacks on Tunisian soil. Most fundamentally, this rationality was built on the notion of the impending threat of Islamist terrorism that was justified mainly by reference to Tunisia's geographical location and the presence of domestic sleeper cells. The existence of Daesh (or Islamic State) in Syria and the instability in Libya were repeatedly mentioned as the most critical external causes that might lead to the collapse of Tunisia.<sup>1</sup> Also, the frequent articulation of so-called sleeper cells as extreme Islamists provided the elites with an easy way to link protests to terrorism, particularly since stressing their existence did not require any concrete evidence in the Tunisian context.<sup>2</sup> Based upon the premise of the inevitable terrorist threat, the elites constructed the notion that unemployed protesters contribute to the operation of terrorists. As there was considerable awareness of the severity of the problems facing the unemployed throughout Tunisian society, particularly since the uprising, the country's elites were hesitant to directly equate unemployed protesters with terrorists. Instead, the protesters'

street actions were often framed as being exploited by terrorists, as the narrative produced by former Tunisian president Beji Caïd Essebsi indicates:

It is never possible to imagine dignity without guaranteeing the right to work. But there were those who tried to hijack this protest and spread terrorism.<sup>3</sup>

The idea that terrorists ‘hijack’ unemployed protests was also promoted through the elites’ over-exaggeration of confrontations between police and protesters, as well as their portrayal of ‘violence’ as being planned and committed solely by the protesters. Former member of the ruling party Nidaa Tounes Farid El-Baji, for instance, described the protests by the unemployed in Kasserine in January 2014 as ‘acts of subversion and chaos’ that ‘overwhelmed’ the security forces. Through his description of the protests, unemployed protesters’ purposes and demands were muted, while their ‘being deviant’ and their negative impact on national security were highlighted. The violent aspect of the protests by the unemployed was also constructed through El-Baji’s neglect of violence committed by the security apparatus during the protests:

It is the terrorists in Tunisia who enjoy most of these acts of subversion and chaos, because these acts are the only way they can overthrow the state . . . The security forces were overwhelmed by domestic protests. It makes it easier for terrorists to cross the borders with weapons.<sup>4</sup>

Although, in most cases, the elites constructed the unemployed protesters as *unintentionally* contributing to terrorism, they did sometimes articulate terrorism with the protesters, especially those in southern border areas, in a more direct but at the same time ambiguous way. Take the narrative of former prime minister El-Habib Essaid as an example. His description of the unemployed protests as ‘fabricated’ gives the impression that they were deliberately designed to cover and allow for the infiltration of terrorists. By portraying the protesters as *intentionally* helping terrorists, the elites blurred the boundary between the unemployed subject and the terrorist subject, and justified the suspicion that some unemployed protesters might indeed be colluding with terrorists:

Essaid revealed that many protests in the border areas in two governorates Meddenin and Tataouine were fabricated to cover for the smuggling of weapons and to allow the passage of terrorists.<sup>5</sup>

### *Emergency measures*

The ruling elites’ securitization of the unemployed operated not only through their speeches but also through various techniques and regulations through which to constitute and reify their rationality of security. For example, ‘preemptive’ measures to counter terrorism, such as arbitrary detention and deployment of the military at sites of protest, served as a securitizing tactic that provided ‘quantifiable evidence’ in order to promote the frame of the threat of terrorism. While it is true that Tunisia has witnessed several militant operations since 2011, it should be mentioned that the Tunisian authorities have significantly inflated the numbers of terrorist attacks and arrested terrorist suspects in their reports. Without providing contextual explanation, Tunisian elites have frequently invoked the terms ‘terrorism’ and ‘terrorist’ to denote behaviours such as street protests demanding the right to work, possession of religious books or ordinary crimes, including robbery and sabotage, among others. This is a reflection of how the conflation between terrorism and the aforementioned ‘misconducts’ was not a mere rhetorical tactic used by the elites. Rather, it was embedded in the everyday practice of the security apparatus in Tunisia.

Another example is a prolonged state of emergency that has served not as an extraordinary tool beyond normal politics but as a ‘new normal’ by which exceptional measures can operate as the rule (Agamben, 2005: 6). With the exception of a short period of time between 2014 and 2015, Tunisia has been under a state of emergency since 2011, and the state has extended this state of emergency on a monthly basis, and even sometimes for periods of four months. While the necessity of a state of emergency has been justified with reference to the threat of terrorism and instability in neighbouring Arab countries, its immediate purpose has been ‘to limit strikes and protests’, as clearly stated by former president Essebsi when he announced the imposition of a state of emergency in July 2015.<sup>6</sup> Emergency measures have served the securitization of unemployed protesters by delineating and categorizing acceptable and unacceptable forms of behaviour. Breaking ad hoc curfews, for instance, was categorized as a ‘terrorist-like behaviour’, justifying suspicions that terrorists might have fabricated protests for employment in order to initiate terrorist operations.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, emergency measures existed before 2011 and were actively used by the Ben Ali regime as a way of maintaining its authoritarian rule. What changed in the post-uprising context, however, is that the state of emergency does not directly control ‘ordinary’ protests. According to many unemployed protesters, it exists today not to suppress the political freedom exercised by the protesters as such but mainly to prevent protests from developing into another revolutionary movement. Indeed, Tunisia’s governing elites have frequently invoked and implemented the state of emergency in ways that encourage unemployed protesters to become disciplined and not cause damage to property while exercising their right to protest.<sup>8</sup> This indicates that, in relation to the unemployed, the function of emergency measures in a democratizing Tunisia is directed less at suppressing their freedom than at ensuring that they practise a form of ‘regulated freedom’ (Rose and Miller, 1992: 174) as a way to ‘secure and extend the power of corporations and the control of capital’ (Dean, 2010: 466).

### *The unemployed as vigilant and entrepreneurial citizens*

The process of the securitization of the unemployed also entailed the construction of particular subject positions of the unemployed to conduct the ways in which they think and behave. We have already seen in the elites’ rationality that they attempted to subjectify the unemployed as intentionally and/or unintentionally contributing to terrorism by describing their protests as being either easily hijacked or fabricated by terrorists. Both naïve and deviant subjectivities that emerged from this rationality served to construct a ‘bad’ protester category, which in turn automatically established a ‘good’ protester category. This categorization served to draw the line between what are and are not legitimate forms of protests in the ‘newly democratizing’ Tunisia, and operated as a means to encourage the protesters to *voluntarily* police themselves while exercising their right to protest. More often than not, this good-protester subject position was promoted with reference to a liberal notion of the ‘citizen’, as illustrated in the following statement by Amna Mansour Al-Qarawi, president of the Democratic Movement for Reform and Edification, in response to the unemployed protests in Kasserine in January 2014:

the citizen is an active partner in the process of development through pressure and contribution and not burning and sabotage . . . [T]he security responsibility is entrusted to all of us . . . The prevention of the terror machine, which attacks the security centre to relieve the pressure on smugglers and armed terrorist groups, requires the firm vigilance and support of the security and military establishments.<sup>9</sup>

By defining the ‘citizen’ as an ‘active partner’ in the process of development, one whose role is ‘pressure and contribution’, Al-Qarawi presented ‘burning and sabotage’ as *uncivil* acts. This

means of creating civil and uncivil categories of practices was frequently used by Tunisian elites as a way of conducting the protesters' conduct in such a way that they would self-regulate their behaviour. Furthermore, the 'war on terror' was framed as the reality under which 'all' Tunisians must share the responsibility for national security, which operated to encourage the protesters, as citizens, to actively participate in protecting Tunisia from the 'terror machine' by being vigilant and supportive of the security forces when exercising their political rights. What the ruling elites meant by citizens' contribution to the process of development is more clearly reflected in the following comment from Moez Bel Haj Rhouma, chairman of the Employment and Investment Committee and member of another ruling party, Ennahda, on the unemployed protests in January 2016:

The state is no longer the incubator that absorbs university graduates . . . It must create the appropriate climate for investment, but we must not forget what the country has gone through as a result of protests and sit-ins. Whenever there is social tension, there are parties involved, including terrorist gangs that seek to inflame Tunisia's current situation in order to create a security vacuum . . . The state has been encouraging microenterprises. We noticed that a number of citizens are willing to participate. Today we seek to change the mentality of the Tunisian citizen and convince him that the public sector is no longer able to hire him.<sup>10</sup>

Rhouma's narrative is an illuminating example of how Tunisia's elites rejected the former social contract between the state and society, replacing it with a liberal notion of economic development in which the role of the state is reduced to providing an 'appropriate climate for investment'. What is notable is that, in the elites' securitizing rationality, the responsibility for the failure of this minimal function of the state was shifted to protests and sit-ins. More importantly, Rhouma's diagnosis of and prescription for the problem of unemployment served to govern not only the behaviour of unemployed protesters but also the *mentality* of the unemployed in general, subjectifying them as 'workers in transit' whose ways of living need to be modified toward the logic of maximizing productivity and entrepreneurship (Foucault, 2011: 139). This shows that the elites' securitization of the unemployed was not a mere authoritarian tool for punishing deviant unemployed protesters, but rather operated to conduct the unemployed subject as *homo oeconomicus* whose exercise of rights and freedom serves the rule of *laissez faire* (Odysseos, 2010: 752).

## Securitization of the unemployed by unemployed protesters

If we now start preparing and organizing for a protest tomorrow, from midnight the media will talk about the threat of terrorists and fear of terrorist infiltration into the country through Kasserine. Do terrorists enter Kasserine only when there are protests?! (Interview 1)

The criticism of the media voiced in the above quotation by Abdul Ahmed,<sup>11</sup> an unemployed protester in Kasserine, was shared by most of the UDC and Maknassy unemployed protesters interviewed by the author. They recognized the elites' articulation of terrorism and the unemployed as one of the regime's new strategies to delegitimize their protests in a 'democratic way'. The elites' securitizing practices thus became one of several important elements that the protesters had to take into account in the process of fighting for their right to work. A close look at the protesters' resisting practices, however, reveals that they resisted such securitization not by desecurizing the unemployed or reconstructing the meaning of security, but by reappropriating the elites' securitizing moves and constructing alternative modes of being. Drawing on the counter-conduct analytic, this section illustrates how the protesters' counter-securitizing practices operated as a self-limited

but nonetheless important technique for resisting the ways in which they were conducted as docile citizens.

### *The UDC's counter-securitization of the unemployed*

Analysis of the UDC's Facebook page indicates that its intervention in the elites' securitizing practices increased from 2015, the year in which Tunisia witnessed three violent attacks on foreign tourists and the security apparatus. According to Jamel Rached, one of the UDC's leaders, many protesters were aware of the elites' manipulation of the fear of terrorism in Tunisian society to 'distract public attention from social and economic problems and to criminalize unemployed mobilizations' (Interview 2), and this had led them to resist the elites' conflation between terrorists and the unemployed. One of the most frequently deployed tactics to challenge the elites' securitizing moves was the invocation of liberal values through which the protests of the unemployed were framed as legitimate and civil actions, as the excerpt below illustrates:

The UDC and the majority of civil forces called for peaceful movements and demanded that protesters not engage in 'suspicious night movements', which were accompanied by acts of looting and deliberate acts of cutting roads, giving the wrong impression that many terrorists are infiltrating into the movements. Accordingly, the UDC:

- Demands that the government respect the right to peaceful demonstrations rather than confronting them violently . . .
- [Calls for] the highest degree of vigilance and awareness in managing and organizing resistance movements, not leaving room for the parties that are working to sabotage the protesters and to bring them to violence and chaos.<sup>12</sup>

This text is part of an official statement by the UDC that criticized state violence against the mobilizations of the unemployed, which began in Kasserine and then soon spread into other regions in 2016. What is notable in this statement is that, in the process of disassociating terrorism and the unemployed, the UDC constructed and articulated a violent-protest category with terrorism, the articulation of which was prompted by the elites to render unemployed protesters as vigilant civil police. In so doing, the UDC's objective was not to desecuritize the unemployed subject as such but to resist the *ways* in which what it perceived as the 'peaceful' category of protest was policed by the state in the name of counter-terrorism. In this particular instance, counter-conduct helps us analyse how the resistance of the UDC protesters was implicated in 'the strategies, techniques and power relationship' they opposed (Death, 2010: 240). In the process of framing the unemployed mobilization in 2016 as civil and peaceful, the UDC reified the elites' securitizing practices by articulating the act of blocking roads, which is one of the main protest tactics deployed by unemployed youth in Tunisia's interior regions, as 'suspicious night movements', chaos and terrorism. More importantly, by calling on unemployed protesters to behave vigilantly and not to give the 'wrong impression' that terrorists are involved in their protests, the UDC unwittingly rendered the protesters (and not the elites) responsible for the conflation of terrorism and the unemployed.

Additionally, two important ways in which the discursive practices of the UDC protesters paralleled the elites' security rationality were, first, the presentation of terrorism as a real and dangerous Islamist threat that needs to be eradicated urgently, and, second, their portrayal of the unemployed as vulnerable to terrorism. As the UDC statement below indicates, terrorism was frequently presented by the protesters as having Islamist attributions and as an infectious disease, evoking the idea of counter-terrorism as a set of surgical treatments that are necessary to purify society.

Importantly, the presentation of unemployment and poverty as the main causes of terrorism, which echoes the elites' security rationality that the unemployed are vulnerable to terrorism, indicates that unemployed protesters were securitized not only by the elites but also, in opposing those elites, by the protesters themselves:

Many unemployed people consider that the terrorism cancer was caused mainly by unemployment and poverty. The plague of terrorism takes the marginalized and poor regions as its shelter . . . [S]leeper cells and terrorist Takfiri cells enter regions that are living in social crisis.<sup>13</sup>

That the protesters did '*not* cease to be governed' while resisting (Odysseos, 2011: 440, emphasis in original), however, does not mean that they passively reproduced the manageable and governable subject position of the unemployed. Analysis of the UDC unemployed protesters' counter-securitizing practices shows that they also actively reappropriated the elites' rationalities and techniques to escape the given subjectivities and to remain "'not so governable" subjects' (Odysseos, 2016: 182). An example can be seen in the Facebook post cited below, in which unemployed protesters were presented by the UDC as revolutionaries against what it considered 'state terrorism':

The state is now practising real terrorism against the people, especially the revolutionaries, activists and unemployed . . . Your crime will only increase our determination to continue the path of our revolution until the unemployed achieve their right to work.<sup>14</sup>

The UDC protesters often framed the state as terrorist in their accusations that state institutions had used sovereign violence (marked by the slogan 'The Interior Ministry, the Terrorist Ministry') or violated socio-economic rights (represented by the slogan 'Unemployment Is Terrorism'). This shows how the protesters attempted to reappropriate negative connotations of the term 'terrorism' promoted by the elites and to use them strategically against the authorities. The portrayal of the authorities as the 'real' terrorist in turn served to render the struggle of the unemployed for the right to work necessary as legitimate 'fight-back'. From the standpoint of counter-conduct, the significance of the revolutionary subjectivity promoted by the UDC protesters lies in how they utilized this subjectivity to escape the ways in which they are governed and to redefine the way they conduct themselves (Foucault, 2007). In this sense, the protesters' presentation of the revolution as being in process can be seen as a *critique* of the elites' subjectification of the unemployed as docile citizens who need to conform to a 'post-revolutionary' phase requiring stabilization of democracy, and as the *will* to remain resilient revolutionaries whose objectives will be achieved only through fundamental changes in the socio-economic structure.

### *Maknassy protesters' counter-securitization of the unemployed*

The counter-securitization of the unemployed was not only part of resisting logics and techniques performed by the UDC protesters who tended to distance themselves from often violent mobilizations of the unemployed in the interior regions. It was also practised as part of protest techniques by locally organized and more radical unemployed protesters. A notable example can be found in the protest tactics adopted by unemployed protesters in Maknassy, a small town in Sidi Bouzid. Although Sidi Bouzid became the symbol of people's power through the 2011 uprising, the socio-economic conditions have changed little since then, prompting the unemployed to continue their struggle for employment. The level of resistance in Maknassy reached its peak in December 2016 when several unemployed youths brought together previously separate interest groups, including

farmers and casual workers, initiating a series of collective actions under the slogan ‘civil disobedience’. The comment below from Abou Mohsen, an unemployed protester in Maknassy, indicates that part of the rationale behind the civil disobedience lay in the elites’ securitization of the unemployed. According to Mohsen, fear of terrorism had negative impacts on public support for the unemployed mobilizations, which in turn led the protesters to modify their protest tactics:

Something new appeared in Tunisia after 2013, which is called terrorism . . . There is fear in Tunisian society that this phenomenon will spread across the country . . . As an example, in Maknassy there were six days of clashes with the police. Over time, people started worrying that this will lead to a security vacuum . . . This is being taken into consideration by the activists. This is why in their protests they escalate confrontation some specific times, and at other times they keep things calm. (Interview 3)

During periods of civil disobedience, the protesters shut down public services and block the main roads necessary for moving people and materials in order to attract public and media attention and to pressure the authorities to come to the negotiating table.<sup>15</sup> According to another unemployed protester, Chahed Mohamed, the protesters’ deliberate violation of laws was also to pose the question: ‘Who is criminal before the constitutional laws? The state? Or us?’ (Interview 4). What is notable about the techniques adopted by the protesters is that they self-regulated their performances to avoid any potential infiltration of terrorists and to present their protests as ‘civil’. As Mohamed narrated below, the protesters also structured their civil disobedience as a *festival* with painting and music in order to show that they were not terrorists. He added that the protesters limited their street activity to the period between early morning and 5pm, and asked police officers to protect public buildings during the evenings:

Concerning terrorism, the youth went out playing music day and night in front of police stations to show that they call for art . . . We all know that terrorism ceases with painting and music. That way we showed that we weren’t terrorists. (Interview 4)

As the protest tactics and Mohamed’s narratives reflect, the Maknassy civil disobedience contained a particular form of resistance that cannot simply be reduced to resistance against socio-economic marginalization. The significance of the Maknassy protest for the counter-conduct analytic lies in the questions of what this self-disciplined civil form of resistance was about and how it sought to ‘adopt and invoke the tactics of government’ (Death, 2010: 244). A significant part of the way in which the protesters resisted the elites’ securitizing moves was through governing themselves as self-responsible and vigilant citizens. By disciplining themselves at the site of a protest, the protesters reified the idea that the unemployed must be vigilant against attempts by terrorists to exploit their otherwise peaceful protests. In doing so, they unwittingly justified and enhanced the elites’ categorization of legitimate and illegitimate forms of protest in democratizing Tunisia. In other words, the Maknassy civil disobedience had the effect of incarnating ‘the modern obsession with control, the desire for order, for certainty, and for essences’ (Bleiker, 2002: 39), which in turn performed the function of upholding neoliberal governing.

However, what the counter-conduct analytic also helps us to see is that the Maknassy protesters’ reproduction of the liberal notion of the civil simultaneously served as a resource for destabilizing that notion. Having performed the role of peaceful and self-disciplined citizens, as the UDC had done, the Maknassy protesters went further to frame what the UDC considered to be chaotic and terrorist-like activities as *civil* disobedience, unsettling the ways in which the boundary between citizen and terrorist is delimited by (and beyond) the governing actors in Tunisia. Their breaking laws in a ‘civil’ and ‘artistic’ way not only operated as a strategic move to ensure that they did not

lose the game of legitimacy but also served as a critique of the elites' attempt to reduce the notion of the civil to participation in procedural democracy. Likewise, as indicated by the quotation from Abou Mohsen's narrative below, the civil disobedience entailed a struggle for *the care of the self* to 'seek, possibly at any rate, to escape direction by others and to define the way for each to conduct himself' (Foucault, 2007: 195):

Now, let's say six years [after the uprising], the social activism is improving its mechanisms. Civil disobedience is the last step of protesting; we did simple protests, strikes, etc., for one year, then evolved into civil disobedience . . . We have not surrendered for the last six years. The youth in the community who were in conflicts with the authorities know that the regime is not able to find solutions nor look for solutions. It wants to keep this reality by all means such as dictatorship and terrorism. How do we escape this reality? With organization . . . Finding a local popular authority capable of making changes is the alternative for the revolutionary path. (Interview 3)

Mohsen's portrayal of civil disobedience as the outcome of the protesters' reflective learning from their previous experience is indicative of how such action was, for unemployed youth in Maknassy, an active 'exercise of the self on the self' to transform the self (Foucault, 1997: 282). His self-reflexive question 'How do we escape this reality?' was linked to an alternative way of being. Instead of conducting himself as a self-responsible individual or entrepreneurial citizen, he proposed 'organization' and 'local authority' as the alternative modes of being by which to complete the revolution. Similar to the UDC case, Mohsen's narrative shows how the 'we-revolutionary' subject position was formed by the Maknassy protesters as an alternative way of being to create a new space of resistance within which they could remain not as easily governable, thereby destabilizing the docile citizen and liberal entrepreneurial subjectivities promoted by the elites.

### *The struggle of the unemployed within and against neoliberal governing*

Most terrorists are unemployed youth. The thing that opens doors to brainwashing and religious extremism is poor social infrastructure . . . Therefore, our slogan is that if you want to eliminate terrorism, then eliminate unemployment first. (Interview 5)

How are we to make sense of the UDC and Maknassy protesters' counter-securitization of the unemployed in relation to their broader struggle for the right to work? And what does the counter-conduct analytic of the securitization of the unemployed add to our understanding of domination and social and economic struggles in post-uprising Tunisia? The protesters' struggle to be securitized differently and their subjectification of the unemployed as resilient revolutionaries reflect an ethical dimension of the unemployed's struggle – that is, the care of the self – that cannot be simply reduced to resistance against socio-economic marginalization. Having said that, as Foucault (2007: 260–261) clearly noted, while distinguished by their unique objectives and forms, struggles to be conducted differently and to conduct the self 'are always, or almost always, linked to other conflicts and problems'. The UDC and Maknassy cases demonstrate that unemployed protesters' counter-securitizing practices were not a type of resistance in isolation but rather a crucial part of their fight for the right to work.

As indicated in the narrative produced by UDC protester Ahmed Murad (Interview 5), while the UDC's presentation of the unemployed as being vulnerable to terrorist propaganda had the effect of justifying the elites' securitizing practices, it simultaneously operated to render the unemployed as the victims of marginalization. This victimhood of the unemployed in turn served to shift the responsibility for the radicalization of unemployed youth from the unemployed to the status of

unemployment caused by impoverishment and to promote the elimination of unemployment as the most efficient way of fighting terrorism. The previously illustrated logics and calculations behind the counter-securitizing practices of the Maknassy unemployed protesters also show 'the connections that were immediately established' (Foucault, 2007: 261) between the self-disciplined liberal forms of protest and the protesters' prolonged struggle for the right to work and regional development over decades. Breaking laws in a self-policing way was a crucial part of the Maknassy unemployed's struggle for socio-economic rights, as 'it sent a clear message to the authorities', noted Mohamed: 'we are going to disobey the law deliberately, because they violated the Constitution' (Interview 4). In saying that the authorities had violated the Constitution, he was referring to Article 40 of the 2014 Constitution, which refers to citizens' right to work.

The UDC and Maknassy cases underscore the close linkage between the care of the self and political and economic dimensions of resistance in the politics of urban poor and unemployed youth in the 21st century (see, for example, Chatterjee, 2004; Death, 2016; Hetherington, 1996). However, the question of why the protesters' counter-securitizing practices became part of the unemployed's struggle over socio-economic marginalization and what this implies about the politics of unemployed resistance more broadly cannot be understood without considering the ways in which political and economic domination is exercised in post-uprising Tunisia. Many unemployed protesters hold the view that they are facing a 'dilemma of democracy' after the uprising.<sup>16</sup> Democracy became a dilemma because, whereas they had been empowered to exercise their political freedom to voice their socio-economic demands, they were now encouraged and regulated to exercise this freedom in procedural ways that could be easily ignored by the elites. The UDC and Maknassy protesters' counter-securitization of the unemployed reflects an important change in the interaction between domination and resistance in Tunisia, in which the previously sharp antagonistic line between unemployed protesters and the ruling elites became increasingly blurred. In comparison to the revolutionary period, the antagonistic frontier between them in democratizing Tunisia became more porous, in part – and significantly – because the elites had attempted to regulate and govern the unemployed through the principle of freedom rather than relying on brute authoritarian means. The elites' securitizing practices discussed above demonstrate that the 'war on terror' in Tunisia was not a mere authoritarian technique of governing. Rather, it had an aspect of facilitating neoliberal governing by encouraging unemployed protesters to conduct themselves as 'free' but vigilant and self-responsible citizens.

The counter-conduct analytic of (counter-)securitization of the unemployed draws our attention to this 'ambiguous relationship' between the governing elites and the unemployed in post-uprising Tunisia, elucidating how the elites' governing and the unemployed's forms of resistance can be 'simultaneously mutually constitutive as well as antagonistic' (Death, 2010: 243). As Carl Death (2016: 202) has argued, counter-conduct helps us to understand how subtle forms of resistance, which tend to be easily written off as self-contradictory or insignificant, 'reproduce, and are themselves produced by, prevailing forms of governance'. It does so in the Tunisian context by explicating how the protesters' moral rhetoric and practices of self-formation that are implicated in the elites' securitizing practices played a crucial (albeit self-limited) part in the struggle of the unemployed. That unemployed protesters resisted the *effects* of securitization rather than the status of being securitized by no means indicates that they were passively governed and subordinate to the neoliberal order. From the standpoint of counter-conduct, it demonstrates that the elites' securitization of the unemployed as a means of neoliberal governing was 'never complete or irreversible', as it entailed 'unintended consequences' that in turn intensified the fragility of the neoliberal order from within (Odysseos, 2016: 194). This was marked by the protesters' disruption of the dominant meanings of 'citizen' and 'terrorist' and their reappropriation of the elites' (counter-)terrorism narratives into the struggle over socio-economic rights.

## Conclusion

This article has introduced Foucault's notion of counter-conduct as an analytic of resistance in processes of securitization. Drawing on insights from the counter-conduct literature, it has argued that counter-conduct enables the governmentality analytic to elucidate a unique form of intersubjectivity in the construction of security that is constituted not through a dominant actor's securitizing moves and an audience's acceptance or rejection of them, but through discursive struggles between seemingly governing and resisting actors. It does so by drawing attention to what this article called 'counter-securitization', the objective of which is to be securitized differently, in pursuit of different aims. Counter-conduct explicates how certain forms of resistance are implicated within dominant securitizing moves and operate to sustain the exercise of domination, revealing disrupting insights about modes of critique. As the analysis of the UDC and Maknassy protesters' counter-securitizing practices indicates, their attempts to present themselves as self-disciplined citizens opposed to Islamist terrorism fell within the pale of state security, legitimizing the delineations between 'the civil' and 'the terrorist' promoted by Tunisia's elites to govern radical forms of unemployed protests.

Simultaneously, however, counter-conduct elucidates how these self-limited forms of resistance also have the potential to *destabilize* state security. Against the elites' articulation of the unemployed with (counter-)terrorism and their presentation of the unemployed subject as a national threat, the protesters' resistance was neither to unmake nor to fully replace the dominant meaning of security. Rather, the protesters counter-securitized the unemployed through the reappropriation of the elites' securitizing practices in a way that enabled them to continue their socio-economic struggles and position their right to work as the most critical step in the 'war on terror'. In doing so, they challenged the discourse of state security and the liberal division between citizen and terrorist *from within* by presenting state violence against protesters as a form of 'real' terrorism and by performing nonviolent disruption in the name of civil disobedience. I suggest that this counter-conductive dimension of resistance is not less meaningful than unmaking or remaking security insofar as it has the potential to challenge the ways in which one is securitized by making use of the existing discourse of security, creating spaces for resistance and seeking alternative modes of being.

In addition to demonstrating the utility of the counter-conduct analytic of securitization in empirical cases, the article has shown how Tunisian protesters' counter-securitization of the unemployed is closely linked to the operation and limitations of governing in neoliberal ways. As highlighted throughout the article, the ethical dimension of the unemployed's resistance observed in their counter-securitizing practices was a crucial part of their broader struggle for socio-economic rights within and against the neoliberalization of Tunisian democracy. This finding opens new avenues of research not only for the ways in which practices of the care of the self relate to other forms of unemployed resistance in post-uprising Tunisia – which is being increasingly incorporated into the global neoliberal regime – but also for the wider power relations in which the unemployed and other socio-economically marginalized groups are embedded.

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## Notes

1. For instance, see the statement made by the former spokesperson of the Interior Ministry Mohamed Al-Arawi; available at <https://www.tuess.com/babnet/106661> (accessed 12 March 2018).
2. See, for instance, [https://africanmanager.com/site\\_ar/نقابي-أمني-تنظيمات-متشددة-تعمل-على-اخت/](https://africanmanager.com/site_ar/نقابي-أمني-تنظيمات-متشددة-تعمل-على-اخت/) (accessed 3 March 2018).
3. <https://www.tuess.com/assabahnews/117786> (accessed 9 February 2018).
4. <https://www.tuess.com/aljarida/26902> (accessed 3 February 2018).
5. <https://www.tuess.com/hakaek/74978> (accessed 12 March 2018).
6. <https://www.tuess.com/assabahnews/106660> (accessed 1 February 2018).
7. <https://www.tuess.com/attounissia/165508> (accessed 8 November 2017).
8. An illustrative example is the comment made by the Ennahda Party's Vice President Abdel Fatah Mourou on the unemployed mobilizations in January 2016; see <https://www.tuess.com/assabahnews/117405> (accessed 8 June 2019).
9. <https://www.tuess.com/attounissia/110774> (accessed 10 March 2018).
10. <https://www.tuess.com/attounissia/165428> (accessed 8 November 2017).
11. Names of interviewees have been anonymized throughout the article.
12. <https://www.facebook.com/697073200322773/photos/a.704955326201227.1073741832.697073200322773/1174202275943194/?type=3&permPage=1> (accessed 1 July 2018).
13. <https://www.facebook.com/udc.org/posts/1062257047124991:0> (accessed 9 March 2018).
14. <https://www.facebook.com/udc.org/posts/818696468147718:0> (accessed 9 March 2018).
15. <https://www.tuess.com/aljarida/26902> (accessed 12 March 2018).
16. This observation is based on the author's informal conversations with unemployed protesters, mostly held in street cafes in Tunis, Gafsa, Sidi Bouzid, Kasserine, Gabis and Tataouine between 2016 and 2017.

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2. Interview with Jamel Rachid, aged 36, unemployed protester, member of UDC, Tunis, 3 April 2017.
3. Interview with Abou Mohsen, aged 33, unemployed protester, Maknassy, 2 February 2017.
4. Interview with Chahed Mohamed, aged 38, unemployed protester, Maknassy, 1 February 2017.
5. Interview with Ahmed Murad, aged 24, unemployed protester, member of UDC, Gafsa, 14 November 2016.

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